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Linda MacDonald Carter

MS. CARTER: These are my props for what I can't say because I don't have enough time.

First I want to thank the Eisenhower Foundation for inviting me to provide testimony on a matter that is dear to my heart. The rebellion influenced and shaped my entire life. My name is Linda McDonald Carter and I've lived in Newark most of my life.

I was two weeks short of 13 in the summer of '67. Since then I've heard and read all aspects -- about all aspects of the '67 rebellion or riots, depending upon the speaker's point of view, mostly from people who didn't live in New Jersey, much less in Newark itself. And if you live in Newark, you know there's a different perspective between being from Newark and simply being from New Jersey.

During this entire time of hearing, reading and studying about the rebellion, I've never heard or read anything about the humanity and the goodness of the people who lived in my neighborhood, the old Third Ward, what is now the Central Ward.

We lived in the brownstones, the wood tenements and the three projects, Scudder Homes, Hayes Homes, and Stella Wright. I lived in Scudder Homes, and what I remember most as a teen is what it was like before the rebellion; the respect, the sense of community and the way we valued each other.

Before '67 we were very clean people because our elders and ancestors had been called dirty for generations because of their dark skin. In fact, I remember the plastered ceilings in our apartment in Scudder Homes began to chip and fall soon after we moved in. As the resident manager of that same project later, I found out this was due to the corruption in the construction trade where cheap, defective materials were used to build Scudder Homes. The resulting conditions eventually led to the implosion of Scudder Homes during the 1980s, but before the city demolished Scudder Homes in the '80s, families tried to keep their floors clean enough to eat on in the '60s.

My brothers and I had to wash down the walls in our hallways and scrub and wax the floor on the 7th floor where we lived. This was while my mother worked cleaning the house of a Jewish family. I was nine years old.

Everyone except the senior citizens on the floor took turns cleaning the common hallways, and that was just something that was expected. You didn't complain. You kept your house and your neighborhood clean, and that meant that everyone had to help.

I'm telling you this to give you a sense of the type of community we were living in. We were not animals living in lawless times. We were a group of people living our lives, loving each other and for the most part enjoying each other's company.

We were not a community looking to make trouble. However, we were a people interested in becoming better, rediscovering our value as African Americans and vowing that our children would have and do better.

Adam Clayton Powell coined a term Black Power and James Brown sang I'm black and I'm proud. Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud. And we liked the sound of that. We'd never heard that before.

We were honest, good, decent, caring, community-minded people. Most of the families had two parents, even the large families of 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 kids. Most had little formal education, but people had common sense and wisdom and some Bible skills that had been passed down through the generations.

Black on black -- I'm sorry.

We worked hard mostly in factories, maybe in a cleaners pressing clothes. Perhaps one or two were lucky enough to obtain a job as a file clerk or a secretary or fixing cars, anything we could get and came to get in the north after migrating from the sharecropping in the south.

While parents worked, kids went to school where we studied from books rejected from the suburbs or better served communities.

Black on black love. We truly cared for one another. If someone died, everyone would chip in to cover the cost of a funeral if there was no insurance coverage by the black-owned insurance company, North Carolina Mutual.

We looked out for one another even though many of us were barely making it financially ourselves. We shared whatever food, clothing or living space we had. No matter what we had, we helped each other. So really it was a rich community.

Respect for our elders. We respected each other and the concept of elders. For example, if an eleven-year-old patrol person asked a nine-year-old not to cross the street, because that nine-year-old respected the eleven-year-old, they didn't do it.

The community was safe for everyone. The elders looked out for the kids, scolded them when they were involved in mischief. Milkmen would leave chilled bottles of milk by the door. Not just at the brownstones, but even in the projects and nobody harmed him.

The community was -- we congregated in each other's apartments and no one stole anything. When we fought or disagreed with one another, even when we fought, it was

not to kill anyone. Real men only fought with their fists, not weapons. That was the street code I remember growing up. Only punks used guns.

Because of their color, it was impossible for this community, these people, these human beings, these dark people to expect that there was wholesale and indiscriminate happening in the neighborhoods.

'67. The rebellion was a recognition that they were not -- that they were not hopeless, but we were angry. High Street was flooded with national guard, tanks and sharpshooters. There was no place to go but the streets, and we kept hearing about people being shot for looking out their windows, really just being nosey, or being clubbed to the ground while simply trying to get home to their families.

My father couldn't even get home from work that night, the first night of the rebellion. They wouldn't let him in the area. There were no cell phones and we didn't have a telephone in our apartment. So we spent the entire night wondering if we would see him in the morning.

I'm not saying I agree with what happened that night or those nights, but I remember our neighborhoods were like -- what they were like before, how hard everyone was trying to make a better life and how difficult it seemed to get ahead.

I remember the tanks I saw on TV from Vietnam out on the streets of my neighborhood surrounding my building and the sharpshooters who were on the roofs aiming directly in my apartment and my mother yelling get on the floor.

And still I remember how I felt. It was like we were the enemy. I didn't understand what we could have done that was so wrong that we deserved to be treated with so much violence.

So my question is when you're angry, when you've been stripped of the ability to negotiate for better circumstances, or at least that is how you feel, and people come into your neighborhood disrespecting your family, seemingly having no value for your life, shooting first and asking questions later, having no value for your community or your struggle, how would you respond?

First, in terms of solutions, I'm here and I'm not going anywhere.

Second, we have to be educated consumers and make people accountable to us.

Third, we need to consider from a criminal justice point of view, give these kids the same opportunities that they have in the better served and over-privileged communities. Sidewalk justice so they don't get into the prison trap.

And the last thing I just want to say is we need to consider subsidizing the efforts of community in the same manner that major corporations or the over-privileged and better-served individuals and communities are subsidized and build out.

We need to work with the community to design tax laws that provide tax relief and allow these dark people, the poor and the under-privileged to have the same opportunities as corporations, over-privileged and better-served individuals and communities.

Thank you.